

twelvebaskets



ORDINARY 16A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Ordinary 16 - Year A
23rd July 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him OR

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me

Readings: Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Hymn:

72 STF – Father God, I wonder I managed to exist OR

491 STF – As servants working an estate

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

469 STF – I watch the sunrise lighting the sky

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder!

Blessing

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Call to worship

The Spirit of the Lord says 'come'.
Jesus Christ, the bride of the church, says 'come'.

Let anyone who hears this say 'come'.
Let anyone who is thirsty, thirsty for the water of life, come.

Come, all are welcome,
The Spirit of God is in this place. Come.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

33 STF – O Lord we are always in your presence OR

461 STF – Come, O thou Traveller unknown

Opening Prayers

For our opening prayers, we are going to use a breathing exercise to help us focus on God, and prepare for a time of worship.

To begin with, find a comfortable position and close your eyes if you feel safe to do so.

Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let it out through your mouth.

When you are ready, whisper to yourself, or say in your head:

Lord, I come into your presence.

[Pause]

Lord, I come into your presence.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I come just as I am

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring everything I have experienced this past week - the things I'm proud of, and the things I wish had been different.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring the people that enriched my week, and the people I found it hard to share my week with.

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring the moments of joy, peace, pride, sorrow, frustration, regret and pain

Breathe in...breathe out...

I bring my hopes for next week

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

Breathe in...breathe out...

I lay all of these things at your feet, and rest in your loving presence

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

One of our readings for today comes from the book of Genesis, where we hear a story about a man called Jacob. He's taking a long, hard journey, and there have been very challenging moments along the way. One evening, he's on his way to the next place. He notices it's getting dark, so he stops to rest for the night. He takes a stone to put under his head, and goes to sleep. He has a dream and, in that dream, God says, 'I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are now sleeping. [...] All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. I am with you, and I will protect you everywhere you go. And I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

I believe this story is meant to remind us that God keeps God's promises. Jacob was promised a safe place to live, a long line of children and grandchildren, and God's constant loving presence in his life. Maybe Jacob was scared these things weren't going to happen anymore. Maybe the challenges that Jacob had faced, made him doubt his journey was worth anything. Maybe he wondered if God was still there, or if he'd been forgotten, left behind.

All throughout the Bible, and in so many ways, we're reminded of God keeping God's promises, through stories and other people's experiences. I think the biggest and best promise of all is this one: God makes promises to be with us no matter what. To love us, no matter what.

Maybe this is something we need to be reminded of sometimes. Sometimes, when we feel really down, it's hard to feel God close. We lose someone we love. We can't see someone we love. We see all these bad things happening in the world, and we wish we could do more to help.

God's promises, like the ones given to Jacob in the story from Genesis, help us when we're on our own long journeys. They remind us that God never leaves us, even in times when we feel like we might be all alone. They remind us that God loves us more than we can ever truly understand. They remind us that, no matter how bad things get, we're not alone and we should always try to have a little hope that we'll see a silver lining.

I like to wear bracelets, and I like to make them too – maybe at some point this week (or during this service if you have the materials) you'd like to make a bracelet or band of your own. If you have ribbon or string, or even just paper, you could make yourself a bracelet or band, and decorate it however you like, with colours or creations that cheer

² Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson

you up. The circular shape can help you remember that God's love has no end – it keeps going forever.

Let us pray,

Thank you God, for your promises, which are completely unbreakable. We thank you that you are always there for us, even when times are hard and it's difficult to feel you close. Help us always to hold onto your promises, remembering the hope they bring us.

In Jesus' name

Amen.³

Hymn:

103 STF – God is Love: let heaven adore him OR

367 STF – When I was lost you came and rescued me

Readings: Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Hymn:

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491 STF – As servants working an estate

Reflections on the readings

Today's gospel reading is one of the more challenge parables. It follows on the heels of last week's 'Parable of the Sower', but this one seems a bit trickier. This one doesn't seem to be about 'where the seed happens to fall', but rather explores echoes of sinners, salvation and eternal damnation.

To help us wrestle with this reading, lets turn to Judith Dimond's series – 'Gazing on the gospels', where she invites us to meditate on the text on what it has to say to us today. You might like to close your eyes and use your imagination as we hear Judith's words:

Imagine yourself listening to a radio station in France, or Spain, or Germany, or wherever you are on holiday or business. Perhaps you learnt that language at school and used to be proficient enough, but now you are rusty and only catch a little of what the speaker is saying.

Imagine you're lost abroad and ask someone the way, but soon you're saying 'Slower, please, I don't understand'. Or you turn on a radio where there is a lot of interference and the voices drift away and nothing makes sense.

Remember the confusion of talking on a mobile phone when the signal's fading or the other person is in a crowded room. You only catch a few words and try to piece

³ All Age Talk written by Emma Dobson

together the meaning with only half the story. Feel the frustration of all these fragile means of communication.

Consider that in one way, Jesus' parables are like a fading radio signal, where we have to listen very keenly to grasp the truth. Yet consider how Jesus disguises unpalatable truths in simple, fireside stories. If we are lazy we can leave them at a childish level; but if we take them seriously, they force us to change our lives.

Consider how this parable builds on last week's. Both are obvious descriptions of normal farming practices and dilemmas. But this one introduces more challenging points. Whereas last week's really made us look inward and judge ourselves, this one makes us look outwards.

Contemplate how you react when your best plans are spoiled by another's carelessness, folly or spite. Can you be patient enough to leave the outcome to God?

What is more, contemplate the divisions within our churches and between churches, the sects that proliferate and the sad tendency we have to accuse the other of not honouring the truth. In the light of this parable, would it not be wise to let 'both grow together till the harvest'?⁴

[Pause].

What do we do with these more difficult readings? How do we sit with the discomfort they raise in us? How do we live from the principle of 'no judgement', allowing grace to be at work in all situations and traditions?

These are all difficult questions raised by the study of scripture and by our attempts to make sense of how we respond. There are further problems flagged up by the Genesis reading and the problematic relationship of Jacob and Esau in the dysfunctional family unit that provides the main narrative in early part of the Old Testament. And the Romans reading is hardly 'easy'!

And yet, in all of these readings, if we look carefully and remain open minded, we can catch a glimpse of heaven...literally.

Matthew points us towards a future time in which all will be made right: in which the evil things (I'm more comfortable with this metaphor being about evil things like greed, discrimination and hate, rather than evil people...are you?) that are entangled in our lives have been removed and destroyed.

Jacob's dream at Bethel is often considered to be a sort of fore-shadow for the later development of what heaven might look like: and the fact that humanity has a ladder, to access this heaven in the way that the angels do in Jacob's dream. In this moment in Genesis, the far-off Creator God who made the world and disappeared again into the ether comes close, breaks down barriers, invites us further up and further in.

And then, in Romans, Paul ruminates on the promise of 'future glory' and how our 'present sufferings' will be nothing compared to all that will be revealed in us. I love the 'in us' of this translation. God's glory isn't something outside of us that will be revealed **to** us, but **in** us. God is with us. Heaven might be far off and in the future, but it's also right here, within us.

As RS Thomas puts it in his poem 'The Kingdom':

It's a long way off, but to get /There takes no time...[if you] present yourself with ...and the simple offering / Of your faith, green as a leaf.

⁴ Taken from Gazing on the Gospels Year A by Judith Dimond

Or, as the Oxford Bible Commentary puts it:
The Kingdom of heaven is both future and realised.

It is 'yet to come', in its fullest, completest sense, when there will be no more crying and weeping and cancer and pain and grief and lockdowns and redundancy and abuse and poverty and homelessness and war...

But it is also realised. It is right here. It is now. It is happening, in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives, in our communities. We are the Kingdom of God, when we join in with what the Spirit of God is up to in the places we call home. Can you hear the invitation today?

What does that look like for you? To see Jacob's ladder in your community – with the angels ascending and descending?

What does it look like for you to see the glory of God revealed in you, if only for a moment?

What would it look like for you to live a life unhampered by the weeds of wickedness and distraction that take you further away from God's plan and dream for your life?

And what do those questions look like as you turn them out, from yourself into the world around you?

That is what gospel saturation looks like. That is what 'having a little heaven down here' looks like. That is what the Kingdom of God is. A world in which we can begin to imagine what it might look like for us all to be experiencing mutual flourishing.

That's what God's love means for you. And for me.

Let us pray.

Lord, I long to shine in your kingdom
And not to be fooled by the tempter.

As all people grow together in one field
May I live as if I am the wheat
And not try to smother the weeds,
For who am I to judge another?
Amen..⁵

Hymn:

455 STF – All my hope on God is founded OR

469 STF – I watch the sunrise lighting the sky

Prayers of intercession

Today, instead of using lots of words for our prayers of intercession, our prayers for the world, we are going to hold a couple of times of quiet, and I simply invite you to bring your own prayers into those spaces.

Firstly, I invite you to spend a moment praying for those close to you: people in your family, your friends, perhaps members of this church, who are in your thoughts. It might be the people you are worried about, or just someone who you know needs to feel God's presence today.

⁵ Reflection written by Tim Baker

In the stillness, hold that person, and their situation, in the light of God's love.

[Pause for a minute or two. You might like to play some quiet music during the stillness].

Come Lord God. Answer our prayers, in Jesus name.

And now, in this space, I invite you to bring a situation or person further afield. Perhaps a story from the news, or a situation or story that has found its way to you. It is probably about people or a person you will never meet, but in this moment, you want to hold those people in prayer. In the stillness, we pray for a better world.

[Pause for a minute or two. You might like to play some quiet music during the stillness].

Come Lord God. You know the names, the faces, the situations that we've held in our hearts and minds over these past few minutes.

Answer our prayers, in Jesus name.

Amen.⁶

We will now take up the offering.

Thank you, Lord, for all you have given to us and all we have received. We respond to your grace with generosity – we give out of the enormous wealth we have received. We are yours, put us to what you will,

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.⁷

Hymn:

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling OR

732 STF – Day of judgment! Day of wonder!

Blessing

God of grace, Spirit of hope, Christ who transforms us – send us out with your courage, your love, your peace to bring into a community and a world in need.

Go in peace, and serve the Lord.

Amen.⁸

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker